

FACTSHEET

Plant Protection & Quarantine

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Orlando Plant Inspection Station

Americans have grown accustomed to seeing a large and healthy selection of plants when they go to their local nursery to purchase a leafy ficus tree or a climbing philodendron or some other exotic plant variety. However, most people do not realize the long journey the plant has taken from Central America or some other foreign home and the careful measures the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has taken to ensure the plant is pest and disease free.

Each year, APHIS officers inspect an estimated 460 million plants that are mailed, carried, and shipped into this country by brokers, travelers, and nursery owners. Some of these flowers and plants carry hitchhiking pests and diseases that are foreign to the United States and could cause great harm to the Nation's agriculture. The golden nematode, the Mediterranean fruit fly, and citrus canker are just a few of the harmful pests and diseases accidentally introduced into this country in the past.

To monitor plants and plant products entering the country as well as inspect them for possible pests and diseases they may be carrying, APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program has established 15 plant inspection stations at select ports of entry throughout the country. At these stations, PPQ inspectors work with scientists, including entomologists, botanists, and plant pathologists, to locate, examine, and identify pests and diseases.

Orlando Station

One of the largest and most technologically advanced plant inspection stations in the United States is located in Orlando, FL. The Orlando station, which first opened its doors in October 1992, is ideally situated in the heart of one of America's most densely populated areas for plant nursery operators. These people have a vested interest in the importation of healthy, pest-free plants as their stock could easily be infected with disease or infested with pests.

The station's advanced technological amenities have made the inspection and treatment processes for plants and plant products both thorough and speedy for nursery operators, travelers, and brokers alike. In 1994 alone, the Orlando staff inspected 20 million plants, 99 percent of which were pest and disease free. The staff expects the number of shipments it receives in the coming years to increase substantially as international trade expands.

Another feature that accelerates the inspection processes is the actual layout of the station. The current setup enables shippers to drop off their cargo in a bay from which conveyor belts carry the materials directly into the main inspection bay. The station also has fully automated fumigation equipment. In the past, plants found with pests were placed in a fumigation chamber where inspectors manually controlled the chamber vents for the timed sequences of the fumigation operation. This older method was more labor intensive. Now, Orlando inspectors can flip a switch and monitor the process.

To quickly and efficiently inspect the large quantities of perishable cargo received at the station each day, the Orlando staff, like the staffs at all APHIS plant inspection stations, works as a team. An entomologist identifies insects, a plant pathologist identifies diseases, a botanist identifies noxious weeds, and several PPQ inspectors examine cargo for pests, diseases, and noxious weeds. PPQ inspectors also work cooperatively with importers and rely on them to provide the proper documents for each of their shipments. Thus far, the Orlando team has had to treat only 1 percent of all the plants imported through their port.

Importing Goods

To import foreign plants and plant products, an importer must apply for an agricultural import permit from the PPQ Permit Unit and secure a phytosanitary certificate from the exporting country. Phytosanitary certificates verify that the plant quarantine officials of the exporting country have examined the plants for pests and diseases prior to their leaving the country. The certificates also identify the plants by their scientific names and confirm that the shipment meets U.S. regulations for importation. U.S. importers

should plan ahead and secure their agricultural import permits for their shipments far in advance of their transport. Import permits may be obtained from:

USDA–APHIS–PPQ

Permit Unit

4700 River Road, Unit 136

Riverdale, MD 20737–1236

(301) 734–8645

When a shipment arrives in the Orlando plant inspection station, PPQ inspectors collect phytosanitary certificates from the importers. Typically, inspectors examine one or more boxes of each variety of the plants and seeds being imported. The inspection process includes a meticulous examination of the leaves, stems, and roots of the plants. With the exception of only a few specified types, plants must not be rooted in growing media, such as soil, because insects, diseases, and noxious weeds could be hidden there. Inspectors also ensure that the plants are a manageable size for the inspection process.

Pests, Diseases, and Weeds

When PPQ inspectors discover a pest, disease, or noxious weed, they take a sample and complete an interception form, which describes what they have discovered and identified. The sample is taken to the proper scientist who confirms the identification. Inspectors refer all insects or pests to the staff entomologist, who examines them and determines the extent of harm they could cause to America's agriculture. If the entomologist determines that an insect or pest is actionable, meaning it is not known to exist in the United States or it exists in limited distribution, the plants are fumigated, reexported, or destroyed. After fumigation, the inspector releases the plants to the importer and allows them to enter the country. Should the entomologist determine that the insect or pest is not harmful and poses no economic threat to U.S. agriculture, the inspector releases the plants to the importer. A similar procedure is followed when plant diseases or noxious weeds are intercepted with plants.

CITES Enforcement

The Orlando plant inspection station, like all PPQ plant inspection stations, has been approved by the Department of the Interior to inspect any plants and plant products, like exotic orchids and cacti, that are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). PPQ inspectors are required to inspect each and every one of the CITES-listed plants to ensure that the plant specimens match the description of the accompanying CITES documents. If the importers do not have the proper CITES documents, PPQ inspectors must seize the plants and offer them back

to their country of origin at that country's expense or place the plants in one of the many designated rescue centers in this country where they are displayed for the public to enjoy.

Mailing Plants

Importers may mail plants and plant products directly to the Orlando inspection station. If you are interested in doing so, please contact:

USDA–APHIS–PPQ

9317 Tradeport Drive

Orlando, FL 32827

(407) 648-6856

In addition, inspectors strongly recommend the following:

- Pack the plants in sturdy boxes or crates.
- Indicate what is inside the package by marking the outside.
- Use APHIS' green-and-yellow mailing label to ensure proper handling of your package.
- Send the packages with priority mail.
- Enclose a note with your name, mailing address, and permit number, so the inspectors can forward the package to you after the inspection.
- Enclose the proper postage fee for forwarding the plants to your address.

Help Keep Pests and Diseases Out

Whether you are mailing a boxwood home from England, carrying propagated orchids back from Thailand, or shipping a load of philodendrons from Central America, USDA encourages you to follow the proper procedures for importing plants and plant products.